



HR Broadcast

USDA APHIS Human Resources Division

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Performance Reviews

Gwen Montgomery, HR Specialist
Human Resources Policy Branch

Spring is here and so are mid year performance reviews!!

The midpoint of the FY2010 performance cycle is quickly approaching. Supervisors and managers are reminded to conduct mid year performance reviews with all their **eligible** employees. MRP has a "best practice" goal of **April 30, 2010** as the deadline for completing the mid year reviews.

Employees are advised to prepare and submit mid year summary reports to supervisors to ensure their accomplishments are captured in their mid year performance reviews.

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Additional information on performance management is available online at

http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/performance_management/performance_appraisals.shtml.

Items posted on the web page include performance management calendar, forms, directives, accomplishment report tip sheet, and other guides and weblinks for both employees and supervisors. Please contact Gwen Montgomery at (301) 734-6341 or Carmen Queen-Hines at (301) 734-5579 if you have questions or would like additional information.

Training Opportunity

Tanya Briscoe, Program Manager
Training and Development

Administrative Processes Training

APHIS Training and Development Branch will offer the Administrative Processes Training via VTC in Riverdale, MD on August 9-12, 2010. This 4-day course provides administrative personnel an overview of the following systems: Human Resources, Procurement, Financial Management, Property Management, and Travel. There are additional spaces left for Minneapolis and Riverdale for that week.

For further program and registration information, please contact the Program Manager, Tanya Briscoe, at 301-734-5551 or email her at tanya.c.briscoe@aphis.usda.gov.

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Check out the trivia corner on the back page . . . How much do you know?

Improving the Hiring Process, Employee Satisfaction, and Employee Wellness

Nancy Varichak, Branch Chief , HR Management and Consulting Branch

In the past year, the Human Resources Division has been involved in several initiatives focused on improving the federal hiring process, employee satisfaction, and employee wellness. You will continue to hear more about these initiatives in the future as we move forward and seek your help in improving in these significant areas. Following is a summary of what's happened so far:

Hiring Reform

In September 2008, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) unveiled the End to End Hiring Roadmap which was designed to transform Federal hiring by strategically integrating and reengineering the hiring process. The five components of Federal hiring identified were: workforce planning, recruitment, hiring process, security and suitability, and orientation. The hiring roadmap established Government-wide measures for the effectiveness of Federal hiring and was developed to address applicant, managerial, and human resources concerns with the following issues:



- Communication with applicants,
- Length of the hiring process,
- Quality of candidates referred for consideration, and
- Lack of human resources and hiring manager collaboration.

In June 2009, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and OPM released memorandums to agencies expressing concern about the quality and timeliness of the Federal hiring process. As part of the budget process, each agency was instructed to: map their current hiring process to OPM's 80-day timeline and identify any barriers, streamline vacancy announcements, notify applicants of their status, and engage hiring managers in the recruitment process.

So... what has Human Resources done so far in response to this initiative? We have:

- Mapped the hiring process for MRP,
- Reduced the length of most vacancy announcements to 5 pages or less,
- Begun providing immediate notification to applicants throughout the hiring process electronically, and
- Conducted focus groups with hiring managers around engagement and improving the hiring process.

In addition to hiring reform, OMB and OPM asked agencies to evaluate and improve employee satisfaction and wellness. Studies show that, on average, happy and healthy employees are more productive and engaged in their work. There is evidence that an engaged workforce leads to improved performance results.

Employee Satisfaction

In response to improving employee satisfaction, USDA developed an Employee Satisfaction Action Plan. The plan focuses on issues resulting from the USDA's lowest scores from the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) and two broader issues related to ensuring adequate infrastructure and communications. To continue to measure employee satisfaction, OPM recently administered the employee survey again, now renamed the Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS). Based on the survey data and follow-up activities, MRP will continue to work to increase employees' satisfaction in those areas identified for improvement.

Employee Wellness

For the wellness initiative, MRP agencies developed an inventory of current wellness activities, cafeteria and fitness facilities, and health clinics. The inventory was included in a USDA comprehensive plan for improvements in wellness facilities and activities for the entire department.



Supervisors' Corner

Nella Roberts, HR Specialist, HR Policy Branch



Maxiflex Time Band Options

Supervisors occasionally find themselves with work that needs to be conducted outside the time band set for operations under the maxiflex work schedule, which for headquarters and some field locations, is from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. Supervisors who find themselves in this situation can consider the options outlined below to assist them in handling those instances.

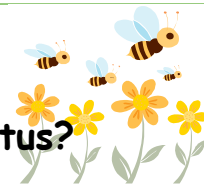
Options for Working Outside the Maxiflex Time Band of 6am – 6pm

Situation A: Computer system maintenance is performed at 5 a.m. for 1 week, in order to minimize disruption to the workforce.	Option 1:* Management has the right to adjust an employee's tour of duty to include the 5 a.m. start time. This must be done before the beginning of the pay period in which the work is to be conducted. In this case, the employee could work 5 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for the one week of the pay period. The employee would remain on their regular schedule for the second week of the pay period.	Option 2:** The employee could be directed to work outside the maxiflex flexible hours, with no change in tour of duty taking place. The change in working hours needs to be communicated to the employee prior to the beginning of the administrative work week (Sunday-Saturday). The employee would earn either overtime pay or compensatory time in lieu of overtime.
Situation B: Computer system maintenance is performed at 5 a.m. for 1 day, in order to minimize disruption to the workforce.		The employee could be directed to work outside the maxiflex flexible hours, with no change in tour of duty taking place. The employee would earn either overtime pay or compensatory time in lieu of overtime. This would be considered irregular or occasional overtime work. Irregular or occasional overtime is work which is ordered and approved by the supervisor after the beginning of the administrative work week.

*Current MRP policy allows supervisors to expand the length of the work day when work demands require such a move. However, the work day expansion is allowed only for temporary situations when the mission of the specific organization requires such flexibility.

** Night Differential is required for regularly scheduled OT work performed between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Again, this work must be scheduled before the beginning of the administrative work week.

Benefits Buzz



What Should You Do To Keep Your Benefits While In Non Pay Status?

Laura Frantes, Benefits Specialist

Call your Benefits Specialist to continue your health and life insurance.

Your Specialist will ensure that you are provided with the opportunity to continue your Federal Employees Health Benefit Program (FEHB) and Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) for up to a year in non pay status. After one year in continuous, non pay status, your FEHB and FEGLI will terminate. Find your Specialist at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/benefits.shtml.

Call BENEFEDS to continue Dental and Vision Insurance.

BENEFEDS will set up direct billing for your dental and vision premiums. If you do not continue premium payments, your dental and vision insurances will be cancelled. Contact BENEFEDS at 1-877-888-3337.

Call Federal Long Term Care (LTC) Insurance to continue LTC coverage.

If your LTC premiums are made through payroll deductions, LTC partners will set up direct billing for your LTC premiums. If you do not continue premium payments, your LTC insurance will be cancelled. Contact LTC at 1-800-582-3337.

Read up on how non pay status impacts Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA).

See the FSA [Quick Reference Guide on Leave Without Pay](https://www.fsafeds.com/forms/grglwop.pdf) at <https://www.fsafeds.com/forms/grglwop.pdf>

View how Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions and loans are impacted by non pay status.

See the TSP Fact Sheet [Effect of Non Pay Status on TSP Participation](http://www.tsp.gov/forms/oc95-4w.pdf) <http://www.tsp.gov/forms/oc95-4w.pdf>

If your non pay status is due to Military Active Duty or Office of Workers' Compensation injuries, you must call your Benefits Specialist. Other rules may apply!

Retirement Benefit Changes 2010 National Defense Authorization Act

Sharon Hudoba and Barbara Watry, Benefits Specialists

The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) established a number of changes which may apply to your retirement benefits. Here are four of the changes which may affect your retirement benefit.

Sick Leave Credit for Employees Covered under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)

Until recently, only employees covered under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) received credit for the balance of their unused sick leave hours in the computation of their monthly annuity (pension) check. By converting the number of unused sick leave hours to years, months, and days, the sick leave balance extends the employee's length of service which is used in the computation of an annuity. Therefore, the addition of the sick leave balance increases the amount of an annuity. Hence, CSRS annuitants have been able to benefit from their unused sick leave balance throughout the lifetime of their annuities.

Effective October 28, 2009, employees covered under FERS, who retire before January 1, 2014, will receive credit for fifty-percent of their unused sick leave balance in the computation of their monthly annuity. Employees who retire on or after January 1, 2014 will receive credit for one hundred percent of their unused sick leave balance in the computation.



Deposits for Refunded Retirement Contributions under FERS

Previously, when FERS employees left Federal service and received a refund of their retirement contributions, the service for which the refund was received was no longer creditable to determine retirement eligibility or used for computation of an annuity. The NDAA grants the authority for rehired FERS employees, who have received a refund of their FERS retirement contributions, to redeposit the amount of the refund, plus interest, and receive retirement credit for that period of service.

A FERS employee who wishes to apply to make a redeposit should complete an SF-3108, *FERS Application To Make Service Credit Payment*, indicating which periods of service were refunded. The form is available at www.opm.gov/forms and may be sent to the Benefits section of the Human Resources Office in Minneapolis. OPM will start to process the applications when the modifications to their system are completed and are able to calculate a FERS redeposits. **Please do not send any type of payment until you have received an actual statement of the redeposit due.**

Part-time Service Annuity Computation under CSRS

The changes in the law affected the way that CSRS annuities with part-time service prior to April 7, 1996 are computed. Prior to this change, the computation of an annuity that included part-time service used a high-three averaged salary based on the actual salary earned; that is, the average of three continuous years of the actual salary earned as a part-time employee.

The change in the law allows for a "deemed" high-three averaged salary to be used for service prior to April 7, 1986. Instead of the actual salary earned being used in the computation of the high-three salary, the deemed high-three averaged salary is based on the pay that an employee would have received if they had been a full-time employee. The use of one deemed high-three averaged salary in both computations will result in an increase in an employee's overall annuity.

Expansion of the Eligibility Date for an Actuarially Reduced Annuity under CSRS: If you are a CSRS employee who received a refund of retirement contributions for a period of service ending prior to October 1, 1990, you may elect to have your annuity actuarially reduced rather than choosing to redeposit the refunded contributions. In other words, you may choose to have your annuity reduced by a calculated amount based on a factor that takes into account the life expectancy for a person of your age at the time of separation and the refund amount, including interest, instead of making a redeposit of the withdrawn retirement contributions, plus interest.

The period of CSRS service now eligible for this reduction has been expanded to March 1, 1991, and applies to non-disability annuities based on a retirement occurring on or after October 28, 2009.

There are several changes in the NDAA, and we expect that OPM will be publishing regulations and forms as soon as administratively possible. Until then, please look for updates reported on our Benefits website: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/index.shtml>.

Charlotte Drone, Benefits Specialist

The more money you save in your Thrift Savings Account (TSP) now, the more money you will have today *and* in the future.

First, contributions are withheld on a tax-deferred basis which lowers your taxable income and increases the money in your pocket today.



Secondly, did you know that if you are an employee covered under the Federal Employee's Retirement System (FERS), you automatically receive an agency contribution to your TSP account equal to one percent of your pay each pay period?

Did you also know that you can choose to contribute to your account, and the agency will match you dollar for dollar on the first three percent of your pay that you contribute each pay period?

And, did you know that the agency will match 50¢ on the dollar for the next two percent of your pay that you contribute each pay period?

Percent of Basic Pay Contributed to your TSP Account (FERS Employees Only)			
You contribute:	Your agency contributes:		The total Contribution is:
	Automatic:	Agency Matching:	
0%	1%	0%	1%
1%	1%	1%	3%
2%	1%	2%	5%
3%	1%	3%	7%
4%	1%	3.50%	8.50%
5%	1%	4%	10%

(Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan, TSPBK08, 7/09)

That's a grand total of a ten percent deposit on a five percent investment!

Sounds good, doesn't it? So when should you start? Sooner is definitely better.



Take a look at an account of a FERS employee who earns \$38,000 a year and contributes five percent to a TSP account (assuming a seven percent annual rate of return, compounded monthly) will be valued as follows:

After 20 years \$165,218

After 30 years \$386,930

After 40 years \$832,494

Here's the amazing part - at 40 years, the employee only contributed \$76,000 out-of-pocket to the account. That's a difference of \$756,494. (*What's Stopping You?*, TSPLF26, 11/09)

So how can you get started? It's very simple. You may elect to enroll using the Self Service tab on the National Finance Center's Employee Personal Page at https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/ep_warning.asp or you may fax a completed [TSP-1 form](#) to the Benefits section at (612) 336-3545. If you have any questions, please contact your servicing Benefits Specialist at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbbs/contact_us/benefits.shtml

Common Background Investigation Issue: *Financial Responsibility*

Submitted by Dru Dukart, Personnel Security Officer, HR Operations Branch

(reprinted with permission from USDA's Personnel & Document Security Division's Winter FY10 Newsletter)

Failure or inability to live within one's means, satisfy debts, and meet financial obligations may indicate poor self-control, lack of judgment, or unwillingness to abide by rules and regulations, all of which can raise questions about an individual's reliability, trustworthiness and ability to protect classified information. An individual who is financially overextended is at risk of having to engage in illegal acts to generate funds. Compulsive gambling and unexplained affluence also creates serious concerns when evaluating a person's eligibility for access to classified information.

Conditions that could raise concern include indebtedness caused by frivolous or irresponsible spending and the absence of any evidence of willingness or intent to pay the debt or establish a realistic plan to pay the debt, a history of not meeting financial obligations, and failure to file annual Federal, State, or local income tax returns as required, to name a few.

To mitigate these concerns, an individual can, among other things, provide documentation that demonstrates a good-faith effort to repay overdue creditors (repayment plan, etc.) or information that shows the conditions that resulted in the financial problem were largely beyond the person's control (e.g. loss of employment, a business downturn, unexpected medical emergency, or a death, divorce or separation).

As a reminder, Executive Order 12674, as amended by Executive Order 12731, titled "The Fourteen Principles of Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees" requires that *"Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all financial obligations, especially those such as Federal, State, or local taxes – that are imposed by law."*

View IRS tax tips at <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=118985,00.html>.

62nd Annual Secretary's Honor Awards

Lynn Doetschman, HR Specialist, HR Division, Office of the Director

The Secretary of Agriculture has invited agencies to submit nominations for the 62nd Annual Secretary's Honor Awards. The Secretary's Honor Awards are the most prestigious awards presented by the Department of Agriculture. Employees at all grade levels are eligible for recognition in the following categories:

- Assisting rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving
- Ensuring our National forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources

The Secretary of Agriculture has invited agencies to submit nominations for the 62nd Annual Secretary's Honor Awards.



- Helping America promote sustainable agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security
- Ensuring that all of America's children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals
- Management Excellence - USDA Every Day in Every Way
- Personal and Professional Excellence
- Support Service
- Heroism and Emergency Response

The ceremony will be held in late summer in Washington, D.C., however, deadlines for submitting nominations packages begin in early spring. To learn more about this year's Honor Awards process and deadlines, please contact your program's Administrative Officer or Resource Management Officer, or Lynn Doetschman in Human Resources (301-734-4996 or lynn.h.doetschman@usda.gov).

Sunday Premium Pay for Part Time Employees

Cindy Hadlich, Supervisor, Leave and Compensation, HR Operations

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management recently issued guidance regarding entitlement to Sunday premium pay for part time employees, as a result of a recent District Court decision in Fathauer v. United States. Part-time employees are now entitled to Sunday premium pay for each non-overtime hour worked as part of their regularly scheduled tour of duty that begins or ends on Sunday. Please click on the link for more information. http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/downloads/Sunday_Premium_Pay_Fathauer_v_US2009.pdf



Part-time employees who were not appropriately paid Sunday premium pay are entitled to file a claim for backpay, which will include applicable interest. A claim for backpay may go back six years from the date of receipt in the Human Resources Operations office. The Human Resources Operations office recently mailed a notification to all current part-time employees of their right to file a claim. Employees must complete the Employee Claim form to file a claim for backpay.

The employee claims are to be routed through their administrative staff for confirmation of the hours claimed and submission of all required documents. Please use the Transmittal sheet to submit a complete package for each employee to the HRO, Leave and Compensation Team. We recommend that you research each claim in the order received and please submit the documented claim to HRO immediately upon confirmation.

Questions may be referred to your servicing Leave and Compensation Civilian Pay Technician using the following link: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/HRO_APHIS.pdf

Part-time employees are now entitled to Sunday premium pay for each non-overtime hour worked as part of their regularly scheduled tour of duty that begins or ends on Sunday.

TRIVIA!! By Andrea Opitz (HR Assistant, HR Operations)

1. You can retain your FEHB and FEGLI coverage up to _____ while on non-pay status.
A. 3 months B. 6 months C. 12 months D. 18 months
2. When you receive Federal service retirement funds, you are not able to redeposit the refund and receive retirement credit for that period of service. True or False?
3. What percent of money can be matched by the agency when investing in TSP?
A. 1% B. 5% C. 3% D. 4%
4. Part time employees are now entitled to Sunday premium pay. True or False?

Answers:
1. C - See page 4 for more information
2. F - See page 5 for more information
3. D - See page 6 for more information
4. True - See page 8 for more information

